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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LIBREVILLE 000386

SIPDIS

AF/C FOR LISA KORTE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/12/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GB](#)

SUBJECT: GABON: ELECTION OBSERVATION UPDATE

Classified By: Ambassador Eunice Reddick for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (C) The African Union (AU) pre-election evaluation delegation led by Dr. Albert Tevoedjre, Mediator of Benin, visited Libreville the week of August 10. The delegation included former ministerial-level and election commission officials from Burkina Faso, Mali and Mauritius. Sent by AU Peace and Security Commission President and former Gabon foreign minister Jean Ping, the delegation met with Interim President Rose Francine Rogombe, Minister of Interior Jean Francois Ndongou and other officials responsible for carrying out the election, presidential candidates, including Defense Minister Ali Bongo Ondimba, and members of civil society. Dr. Tevoedjre will return for the election with an AU &goodwill18 delegation that will not function as an observation mission. With regards to other election-related delegations, we are not aware of any bilateral partners sending observation teams. The international francophone organization (OIF) intends to send an &information8 delegation. Meanwhile, the training of local election observers has begun, though those observers have serious questions about their role in the process. END SUMMARY.

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AU Will Send Goodwill Mission for the Election  
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¶2. (C) The Ambassador met August 11 with the AU pre-election evaluation delegation led by Dr. Albert Tevoedjre, Mediator of Benin. Tevoedjre said he would return with an AU delegation of about 40 members a week prior to the August 30 election. The AU team will be a &goodwill18 and &friendship8 mission rather than an election observation team, according to Tevoedjre, because it will have limited travel outside Libreville and will not be able to cover voters, bureaus throughout the country. Tevoedjre said he will make no public statements regarding transparency or fairness after the votes are in, but he intends to submit a report following the election to Jean Ping and Gabon officials.

¶3. (C) Tevoedjre said he came away from his meetings in Libreville with a sense that the President and the government were making their best efforts to establish the basis for a fair election. However, they were not prepared for the transition that was triggered by President Bongo,s death. The difficulties surrounding the revision of the electoral lists reflected the lack of preparation. As imperfect as the electoral list is, Tevoedjre noted, it had served as the basis for the last legislative elections and could be updated.

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Ali Bongo and Too Many Candidates  
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¶4. (C) Regarding the continued presence in the cabinet of ruling party candidate and Defense Minister Ali Bongo (a major complaint of opposition party and independent candidates), Tevoedjre commented that Ali Bongo might resign in a few days, at the start of the official two week campaign period. Although he had no confirmation from Bongo, Tevoedjre said the defense minister was well aware of the controversy.

¶5. (C) Tevoedjre expressed concern about the large number of candidates. He said it was hard to gauge the seriousness of all 23 but assumed that alliances would be formed during the two week campaign. Even with a reduced number of candidates, the single round election could result in a victory with a small percentage of votes and a close margin. Tevoedjre commented that following the 2009 election, Gabon,s leaders should review the single round format and its complications and consider changes to election laws and the constitution.

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CEEAC and OIF Election Teams  
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¶6. (C) Based on our discussions with Tevoedjre and diplomats in Libreville, we have learned that the International Organization for Francophone Countries (OIF) will field a small &information8 team to meet with candidates, government and civil society. The OIF delegation will arrive a few days before the election and depart soon after. AU and OIF contacts have been careful to correct any misinterpretation that they are sending formal election observers to Gabon. The Embassy has heard that the Economic

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Commission for Central Africa States (CEEAC) is also likely to send a delegation for the election.

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Training for Gabonese Election Observers Underway  
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¶7. (C) PREGESCO, a CEEAC-related entity funded by CEEAC-partner nations, is conducting a three-day training seminar this week for Gabonese election observers. PolOff attended the openi.g beremny"and fibst`training wgsSilns.JFirQi-gour"Gabonu{ea|ventads{tartab i`iveD,k.`ti nmssd dy,QQeost,kf whm4w\$Re\$[o`AtfQF

privately assured PolOff that they would refuse to stay quiet if they saw widespread or blatant fraud in the electoral process.

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COMMENT  
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18. (C) Tevoedjre,s comments reinforce our understanding of the electoral landscape. The Interim President and her government are struggling to keep up with the demands of a snap election. Besides public calls by the opposition for Ali Bongo to step down, we are unaware of any plans by Bongo to step away from the Minister of Defense position, though such a move this late in the game would be little more than symbolic. The discontent by the PROGESCO election observers over their vague role reflects a general uneasiness by the Gabonese that a truly transparent and fair election may not be in the works. END COMMENT.  
REDDICK